

Applying for the Mandela Washington Fellowship: Use the YALI Network!

YALI Network members in Nigeria show their stuff. (State Dept.)



If you are reading this blog, following the [YALI Network Facebook page](#) or the [YALI Network Face2Face group](#), and otherwise taking advantage of YALI's ability to connect people online and through local events, you have a great advantage as you pursue your quest to be a 2018 [Mandela Washington Fellow](#).

But don't just take our word for it. Several 2016 Fellows whose previous applications had not been successful found different ways to use the YALI Network to get advice, feedback or other help with their next attempts.

Rita Zaumu from Cameroon said, "The Network helped me a lot because the past Fellows ... gave a lot of heads-up about how to go about applying for the fellowship. I spent something like five hours a week on the YALI Network and Face2Face pages to see what people are doing in their communities."

Zambian Fellow Mwanga Simwanda said the YALI Network "really made it possible for me because they got in touch with me after my first application, and through the Zambian Embassy I received a lot of emails allowing me to network with other people and the Zambian YALI alumni."

Through her participation, Simwanda discovered local events with Fellows where she learned tips on how to improve her application and understand what the recruiters were looking for.

The Zambian YALI Network coordinator "would contact us and host seminars for us on how to apply and link us with the alumni that came and their experience and how they applied. She really was just encouraging us to apply and apply and apply. ... I got to network with other people and through the network I met a lot of different people," she said.

Simwanda, overcoming her disappointment from earlier unsuccessful attempts, learned what they had done differently on their applications. "So I tried the third time, and here I am. I made it!"

Wilfrid Marx Abidji from Benin turned to the YALI Network for advice when he found out he had been selected for an interview and he was working to improve his English-language skills.

"I was really impressed with the speed and the proactive way people reacted on the Network," he said.

Abidji advises, "Don't close your door and be alone. Open yourself, go to the YALI Network and ask questions."

Agang Ditlhogo from Botswana said the encouragement she received from successful applicants "kept me going" and motivated her to try again.

"All through the application I would ask for advice, like 'This essay is only 200 words but I want to

go on for 700 words. Where do you think I should cut it? Where do you think I should modify it? So they offered that platform for us,” she said.

She said Fellows are especially important in countries like hers where not everyone has access to the internet. “They are a precious resource,” she said. “They went back to their communities [and explained] this is how they started, and that is very inspirational.”


Perhaps, like Fanta Coumba Karembé from Mali, you knew someone before they became a Fellow, and were amazed by the transformation.

“When my friend came back from this program he was completely changed. I could see stars in his eyes, lots of confidence in himself and all the things he wanted to achieve. It was like he was on a different level,” she said.

The YALI Network can help by offering a platform to learn about Fellows’ experiences. “When you read about young leaders and their stories, what they want to do in their countries and share information, it’s exciting. You realize you are not the only one thinking in these ways and you feel that change is possible. They give you motivation,” Karembé said.

Good luck with your application!

Applying for the Mandela Washington Fellowship: Which track should I choose?

You have three tracks to choose from to be a Fellow studying at a U.S. college. Choose  carefully! (© AP Images)

As a Mandela Washington Fellow, you would learn a lot and meet many useful contacts over the course of six weeks on a U.S. college campus. Looking over [the application](#), you will notice there are three separate tracks or themes of study, and you are asked to “rank the sector/track in order from the track that most closely aligns with your daily work, education, or community involvement.”

These are your choices:

- Business and entrepreneurship.
- Civic leadership.
- Public management (including a specialized program focused on energy policy).

You may be especially interested in one, or even all three, but some former Fellows would advise that you pay close attention to the wording in the application. It’s not so much about what interests you. It’s more about what you are doing now.

Juby Peacock, a 2016 Fellow from Botswana, learned this lesson the hard way. She wanted to study business and entrepreneurship, but because she didn't currently have a business of her own, her first application was unsuccessful. The next year she tried for the civic leadership track. Again, she did not qualify.

"I thought I'm such a loser. I'll never try again," she said. Bear in mind that this remarkable person had 12 years of experience in social work and volunteerism in addition to being an accomplished artist. Oh, and she was also once Miss Botswana.

Peacock realized she hadn't made a critical point clear to those reviewing her application. Her involvement with an arts-based nongovernmental organization actually made her a civic leader in practice. "I was doing it all along, but I just didn't know how to say it," she said. She tried again for the civic leadership track and met with success.

"What I realized is that I did not actually understand the tracks at first," said 2016 Nigerian Fellow Balarabe Ismail. "I learned I have to know the track I am applying for, and will I have the skills or the experience in those areas."

Rita Zaumu, a 2016 Fellow from Cameroon, said she has "a passion" for community service and was strongly considering applying for the civic leadership track. But with several years of business experience and as founder of a communications company, she realized this might not be the best choice. "After a lot of reflection, I decided it was better to apply from what I have been doing for the past seven years," she said.

On the [YALI Network Facebook page](#), Adepeju Jaiyeoba, a 2014 Fellow from Nigeria, advised hopefuls that "you don't want to confuse the application reviewer such that they won't even know the track to place you."

"Here's my advice: Of the three areas, which one provides you with the most evidence of effectiveness? Which one do you desire to grow most in? Which one do you think the Fellowship is best positioned to help you advance? When I was applying, I had an NGO and a business. I applied for business because I wanted advancement in that area and I got it," she said.

So think about your choice. It matters.

Good luck with your application!
